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Outlet identified as Preferred Alternative at Devils Lake

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Army's Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Robert B. Flowers, has identified a constructed outlet at Pelican Lake as the preferred alternative to alleviate flood damage at Devils Lake in North Dakota if the lake continues to rise. The final Environmental Impact Statement will be released soon for public review. The Chief will use all information gathered during that review in making his final recommendation to Congress.

Devils Lake is an inland lake with no natural outlet. The area surrounding the lake has experienced unusually wet weather that has caused the lake to rise 25 feet in recent years. This has led to the destruction or relocation of more than 500 homes and the expenditure of more than \$350 million in federal funds to control flood damages.

In 1997, Congress directed the Army Corps of Engineers to examine the feasibility of an emergency outlet and to prepare an environmental impact statement. The Corps has examined several options, including raising roads and levees, upper basin storage and building an outlet at one of several locations. In the Omnibus Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003 just signed by the President, the Congress directs the Corps to construct an emergency outlet from Devils Lake to the Sheyenne River, subject to several conditions. One requirement is to have assurances from the Secretary of State that the project will not violate the Boundary Waters Treaty.

The Army Corps of Engineers has examined the Pelican Lake outlet alternative in detail in an integrated planning report and final environmental impact statement that the Corps will release for public review in the near future.

"I have considered the flood damages associated with the continuing rise in lake levels together with the social, economic and environmental consequences that would occur if the lake overflowed into the Stump Lakes and then into the Sheyenne River," Lt. Gen. Flowers said. "These impacts, in my professional engineering opinion, warrant selecting an outlet at the Pelican Lake site as the most practical way to balance the social, economic and environmental needs of the region. We can moderate the impacts of an overflow in a controlled manner with an outlet."

The Corps has determined that, if the wet weather continues, another 163,000 acres could be flooded and additional damages in excess of \$900 million could occur. Under such conditions, the lake would eventually overflow into the Stump Lakes and then the Sheyenne River. Then, besides raising salinity levels in the river, this would cause the river to flood, the groundwater to rise and erosion to increase as well as the loss of aquatic and riparian habitat.

The Corps has determined that the best location for an outlet would be at the Pelican Lake with the flow going to the Sheyenne River. This water then flows into the Red River of the North forming the boundary between North Dakota and Minnesota before flowing into Canada. The estimated cost of the outlet is \$186.5 million.

Following public review of the final environmental impact statement, Lt. Gen. Flowers will recommend a course of action. If he chooses the Pelican Lake outlet plan after considering the public comments, other federal and state agencies would have to take additional actions before the outlet could be constructed and operated. Those actions include assurances provided by the Secretary of State, water quality certification by the state of North Dakota, and a Department of Interior determination regarding compatibility of the outlet with Lake Alice National Wildlife Refuge.

Additional information on Devils Lake is available at: <http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/finder/display.asp?pageid=14>